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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, November 26, 1931.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "What Thanksgiving Day Should Mean to the Children." From article by Virginia Terhune Van de Water, in "Children, The Magazine for Parents,"

--ooOoo--

Since this is Thanksgiving day, and I know you are not in the mood to listen to recipes and menus, I'm going to read a story I've been saving for this very occasion. The title is "What Thanksgiving Day Should Mean to the Children," by Virginia Terhune Van de Water.

You can go on about your baking while I read, for there is nothing to write down this morning. This is the story, called:

What Thanksgiving Day Should Mean to the Children.

"What is Thanksgiving Day for?" one small boy was asked.

"It's the first day in the winter that we have turkey and pumpkin pie," was the prompt answer.

His answer was greeted with smiles by his elders. Nobody suggested to him that there might be any other reason for keeping Thanksgiving.

I do not want to draw a moral ... but I do feel that behind this failure to emphasize the meaning of Thanksgiving there is the habit of allowing children to take everything for granted. Why be thankful for that to which they have a perfect right? ...

Of course, when the children read or study the history of their country, they will learn how Thanksgiving originated -- just as they learn the origin of Independence Day. But I doubt if one small boy in a thousand gives even a passing thought to the Fourth of July, except as a day on which he may make as much noise as he pleases, and do many things that are forbidden for 365 days.

Christmas, too, is often regarded simply as a holiday when people exchange gifts. Yet so much of the symbolism of Christmas and so many of the cards and decorations recall the birth of the Babe in Bethlehem, that it is impossible for a thoughtful child to get away from what it all stands for.

Not so with Thanksgiving. That is a day when one takes unthinkingly all the good things set before one.

Far be it from me to hark back to the old times, and say that they were better than these! I do not think they are. I have a shrewd suspicion that this is the very best of times in which to be alive. But there were certain things connected with our childhood that were object lessons, from which we learned that back of a symbol was a cause.

For instance--there was Thanksgiving. We in our family, did not go to our grandparents' home for that festival. Instead, we had a good time in our own house. But that good time stood for something, and we were taught that it must stand for something to others less fortunate than we. We liked good things to eat, but I am sure our turkey and pumpkin pie tasted rather better for the knowledge that certain poor families were feasting as we were.

I have an idea that the method used in making us remember that we were stewards of our possessions was rather a good one. May I be pardoned if I explain it?

First, we taught the habit of gratitude. Gratitude to each other, gratitude to our parents, gratitude to anyone who did us a kindness. Above all, we were taught that a Heavenly Father made it possible for us to have our good things, and that we must never forget to be grateful to Him. That gratitude involved certain duties. If--and this is what I would emphasize--one had blessings, one was in duty bound to make someone else happier for these blessings. That was but fair and honest, a passing on of good things so that every gift one received might be a source of happiness to someone else.

This may not seem an ideal principle to the modern parent, but it could be modified or adapted so that the young generation might understand that on Thanksgiving one should pause to consider one's blessings, and the responsibilities they bring.

I fear that we do not teach gratitude as we should. When our tiny children receive gifts, we ask--"What do you say, dear?" and the reply "Thank you!" uttered as a kind of shibboleth, is all sufficient. But are we concerned as to the child's mental reaction to the two words? Or is the form all that we demand?

I am thankful to say that I know several really grateful children. I have a little boy friend to whom I once in a while make a present--often something so trifling that it would hardly call for an expression of gratitude. Yet even if it be but a picture card, it is received with appreciation that warms my heart. I always hear the delighted --"Oh--fank you!" Then the appeal to the mother--"Oh, Muver--just see what I've got!"

Yet this child receives scores of presents. As an only child of popular parents it is natural that this should be so. But I claim that his manner of receiving speaks volumes for his father and mother. The little lad has never become blasé because he has never been allowed to accept things as his due, nor take his blessings for granted. Moreover, he has been taught to share them with other children, and enjoys going through his treasures at regular periods and weeding out certain articles--under his mother's supervision-- for poor, ill and crippled children, which only shows that gratitude and generosity may go hand in hand.

I admit that all children have not as sweet natures as has my small boy friend, but I do insist that a sense of gratitude may be cultivated. Also a sense of obligation to other people. To utter thanks trippingly and politely is a type of word service that is seemly and becoming. But back of the utterance should lie genuine appreciation. A child may be taught to feel gratitude towards the person who does him a kindness, even if he does not fancy the form this kindness assumes.

"You would not have him say 'thank you' when he does not mean it, would you?" protested one mother to whom I voiced my convictions along this line. "For instance, my little Jack refused the other day to thank a playmate for an invitation to a party, because he did not want to go to the affair. Should I have made him say that he was glad to get the invitation?"

Most certainly not. But I would have this mother explain to her son that his playmate meant to pay him a compliment in asking him to his home. Therefore, it was only right that the recipient of the invitation should be grateful for the thought that prompted it.

I acknowledge that it is not easy to inculcate such ideas, and parents are often too busy or too thoughtless to attempt it. Now, when we study child psychology as we have never studied it before, when we understand how much of the little one's future welfare depends on early training, we sometimes forget certain fine things of the spirit that should be inculcated. It is a case of "these things ought ye to have done, and not to have left the others undone." One of the greatest of spiritual attributes is an appreciation of the good and beautiful in life. If we want our children to have this appreciation we must begin very early to teach it.

Suppose that, just as an experiment, we call the youngsters' attention to some of the blessings that are theirs at this Thanksgiving, and try to show them that these are gifts, not things that are their right--that there are many persons who lack such gifts, and that all blessings should cause gratitude and should be shared with others.

Teach your children to share their blessings with others, and Thanksgiving Day, as well as all others, will gain to them in significance and happiness. Encourage your children in the habits of gratitude, and thoughtfulness for others, and every day is thus transformed into Thanksgiving.

Train your children in the gracious habits of gratitude and thoughtfulness for others, thus helping them to transform every common day into Thanksgiving.

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Tomorrow: "Using the Thanksgiving Left-Overs."